

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 02872 091211Z

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ACTION NODS-00

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7602

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 2872

NODIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US

SUBJECT: FURTHER MESSAGE ON LEBANON; ASAD REQUESTS DAOUDI
RECEIVE PRESENTATION ON PEACE PROCESS

REF: STATE 112808

1. PASSED TO DAOUDI REFTTEL'S ADDITIONAL POINTS ON THE
LEBANESE SITUATION MORNING MAY 9. HE TOOK VERBATIM
NOTES AND THEN READ BACK PARA 3 CONCERNING DISTORTED
ACCOUNTS OF US ACTIVITIES IN THE SYRIAN PRESS.

2. IN COMMENTING ON PARA 3 DAUDI, EMPHASIZING HE WAS SPEAKING
UNOFFICIALLY, SAID HE BELIEVED THAT SUSPICION OF USG
ACTIONS IN LEBANON WAS FOCUSED IN INNER CIRCLES OF BAATH
PARTY. THEIR SUSPICIONS HAD BEEN STIMULATED BY LEBANESE PRESS
REPORTS OF AMBASSADOR BROWN'S MISSION AS WELL AS BY INTERPRETA-
TIONS OF THAT MISSION CARRIED TO DAMASCUS BY VARIOUS LEBANESE
DELEGATIONS OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. HE THOUGHT THAT
PARTY SUSPICIONS HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY EXCITED BY PURPORTED
LEAKS FROM JUMBLATT'S SUPPORTERS AFTER BROWN'S MEETING WITH
LATTER. THOSE "LEAKS" HAD UNFORTUNATELY CONTRIBUTED TO
IMPRESSION IN DAMASCUS THAT SYRIA WAS NOT BEING KEPT
"COMPLETELY INFORMED" ABOUT AMBASSADOR BROWN'S MISSION. DAOUDI
SAID PERSONALLY HE ALWAYS TOOK WHATEVER HE READ IN THE LEBANESE
PRESS, OR WHAT WAS TOLD HIM BY A LEBANESE POLITICIAN WITH A
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 02872 091211Z

GRAIN OF SALT, LETTING IMPRESSION HANG IN AIR THAT SOME

BAATHIS (HE IS NOT A PARTY MEMBER) WERE MORE GULLIBLE.

3. REPLIED THIS WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME I HAD CONVEYED MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY FOR PRESIDENT ASAD CONCERNING OUR SURPRISE AND DISTRESS AT THE DISTORTED REPORTING OF OUR EFFORTS IN LEBANON. OUR CONCERN ABOUT THIS ISSUE WAS MANIFEST. SPEAKING PERSONALLY MYSELF, I FAILED TO SEE IT AS IN SYRIA'S INTEREST TO PORTRAY AMERICA AS AN ENEMY OF SYRIA AND AS HAVING WORKED FOR ANYTHING BUT TO RECONCILE LEBANESE POLITICAL FACTIONS AND TO HELP LAY THE BASIS FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF THAT COUNTRY. DAOUDI EMPHATICALLY AGREED IT WAS NOT USEFUL TO HAVE WASHINGTON DESCRIBED AS AN ENEMY BUT MADE NO FURTHER COMMENT.

4. DAOUDI THEN SAID THAT PRESIDENT HAD ASKED HIM TO RELAY THE FOLLOWING QUESTION TO YOU. WOULD YOU AGREE TO MY CONVEYING OUR THOUGHTS ON THE PEACE PROCESS TO DAOUDI WHO WOULD BRING THEM TO THE PRESIDENT'S PERSONAL ATTENTION INSTEAD OF THROUGH A DIRECT MEETING BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND MYSELF? ASAD HAD NOTED THAT HIS SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS WOULD BE AS CROWDED AS IT HAD BEEN FOR THE PAST TWO BUT HE WISHED TO HEAR OUR VIEWS ON THE PEACE PROCESS SOONEST AND TO GAIN TIME BY HAVING THEM PRESENTED THROUGH DAOUDI.

5. COMMENT: WHILE I WOULD PREFER TO HAVE THE BENEFIT OF ASAD'S IMMEDIATE REACTION TO OUR TALKING POINTS ON THE PEACE PROCESS, I CANNOT DENY THAT HIS SCHEDULE HAS BEEN EXTRAORDINARILY FULL. HE HAS BEEN ENGAGED DURING THE PAST WEEK IN ALL NIGHT SESSIONS WITH A SERIES OF LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN DELEGATIONS AND THESE ARE LIKELY TO CONTINUE, ALONG WITH HIS PREOCCUPATION WITH INTERNAL SECURITY MATTERS. IN THE RECEIVING LINE AT LAST NIGHT'S DINNER FOR KING HUSSEIN, ASAD LOOKED MARKEDLY HAGGARD.

6. HOWEVER, INSTINCT TELLS ME OVERWORK MAY NOT BE THE ONLY REASON ASAD IS ASKING THAT DAOUDI HEAR OUR PRESENTATION. AT THIS PARTICULAR JUNCTURE ASAD MAY PREFER AVOID REPORTS GETTING AROUND THAT HE HAD MET WITH ME. (WHILE SEVERAL OF OUR MEETINGS IN RECENT MONTHS HAVE NOT BEEN OFFICIALLY PUBLICIZED, WORD

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 02872 091211Z

NONETHELESS GENERALLY CIRCULATES IN THE SMALL TOWN ATMOSPHERE OF DAMASCUS WHEN SUCH MEETINGS HAVE TAKEN PLACE.) WOULD NOTE THAT LAST NIGHT WAS THE FIRST OCCASION SINCE EARLY MARCH TO HAVE EVEN A BRIEF WORD WITH SHIHABI WHO ALSO WAS IN THE RECEPTION LINE. HIS REACTION TO MY EXPRESSED HOPE THAT WE COULD MEET IN THE NEAR FUTURE WAS NOTABLY UN-ENTHUSIASTIC, REINFORCING MY IMPRESSION THAT THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP MAY BE TRYING AVOID OTHER THAN "BACK DOOR"

CONTACTS WITH US RIGHT NOW.

7. SUBJECT YOUR APPROVAL, SUGGEST I PROPOSE THAT DAOUDI BE
USED AS INTERMEDIARY TO RECEIVE OUR INITIAL PRESENTATION ON
THE PEACE PROCESS BUT THAT I REQUEST ON YOUR BEHALF THE
PRESIDENT RECEIVE ME AFTER HE HAS HAD CHANCE TO REFLECT UPON
OUR TALKING POINTS SO I MAY HEAR HIS COMMENTS DIRECTLY.
PLEASE ADVISE.
MURPHY

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